SATURDAY PAGE

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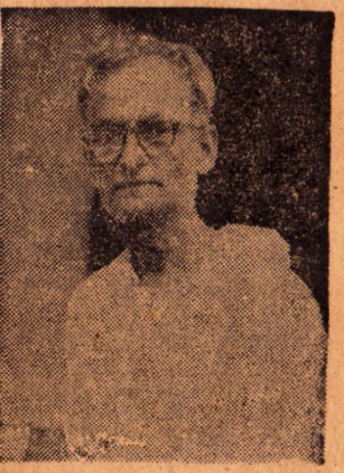

*Digavalli Venkata Siva Rao*

# 2 scholar politicians with a difference

THERE are in our country persons who believe that politics is a judicious and pleasant combination of fine arts social service and original thinking. To such category belong Mr. Vasireddi Durga Sadasiveswara Prasad and Mr Digavalli Venkata Siva Rao.

Mr Prasad is a scholar in Sanskrit and Pali lore and Hindi. Mr. Siva Rao is an encyclopeadia of the times beginning from British entry into India and their exit. Both are septuagenarians. Despite the onslaught of old age which is denting their capacity to see and read they are adamant book-worms. Both of them had to give partial rest to their ears since a decade. Mr. Prasad was a zamindar better known as Javantipuram Raja. Mr. Siva Rao belongs to a family of diwans.

Mr. Siva Rao came to Vijayawada in 1922 to practice as a lawyer but Mr. Prasad had no such formal education. He learnt from teachers engaged by his father at Jaggayyapet. One of the teachers was Poondla Venkatannayya, a versatile person who made experiments with every leaf and root and every available chemical in addition to teaching other subjects. Somewhere in 1922 Veturi Prabhakara Sastry came to Jaggayyapet area in search of old manuscripts. Mr. Prasad joined the search only to slip into a life long avocation of research subsequently.

They came into contact in 1923 in connection with a case but that cemented their friendship for life. Mr. Siva Rao, as a student at Madras literally consumed the Connemera Library and Old Records Library and one will be surprised to find his copious notes well preserved till now. Even today he can lay his finger on a particular topic noted in his books and develop it into an article. Mr. Prasad gets hold of rare books. But his speciality is his capacity to learn from life. A journey one day revealed to him the conflicting qualities of human outlook in steep and sharp contrast and he wrote the poems Karunaamayi.

In 1922 Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao and Tenguturi Prakasam went to Jaggayyapet to collect money for the Khaddar Fund and quite naturally they approached Venkatadri father of Mr. Prasad. Venkatadri was doubting whether as a zamindar he could extend his patronage to the Congress particularly with a powerful band of Justice Party men prowling the political field of the province. Any way he donated five puttis of cotton grown in his fields and incidentally his son too was donated to the national movement. Mr. Prasad then organised the Taluk Congress Committee and this was additional avocation to him.

Mr. Siva Rao had a number of friends one of whom was the famous poet Rasavaraju Apparao whose song "Kalleavi kattite nemi — maa Gandhi Maaladai tirugute nemi" had already caught the imagination of the people. The police arraigned Mr. Siva Rao before a court of law "for instigating Apparao to write seditious songs". Mr. Siva Rao to prove that Apparao himself wrote the songs cited some witnesses who were by then in a jail. That way he was responsible for bringing them all the way from the jail to Vijayawada and provide an opportunity for their people to see them.

In 1923 Mr. Prasad started a literary journal Saraswati from Muktyala. Many were the scholars and poets that contributed original works to Saraswati. Mr. Prasad himself wrote many including a translation of a Buddhistic work. The journal was popular among literary circles. But it did not survive its seventh birth day.

Mr. Siva Rao was mainly the public relations officer of the Congress. Every week in some journal or other his articles on the evil state-craft of the Britishers since the East India Company days, was appearing and exciting the people. He has a knack of giving a story finish to every incident that was perpetrated by the foreigners. All these appeared as "Kathalu-Gaadhalu" subsequently. Mr. Siva Rao was also the special correspondent of the daily, Swarajya of Prakasam. He was fearless in the court and many were the occassions when he extracted apologies from the presiding officers or corrected them.

These activities might look insipid to the present generation but to have taken such stances during the British days, called for a good deal of courage.

Mr. Prasad was elected Nandigama taluk board president in 1932 but the Justice Party got it abolished in about ten months. Some years prior to this finding his book Dhammapadam a Telugu translation of the Pali original, some persons complained to his father that he was studying "Naastika Darsanaas" (scriptures of athiesm). But Veturi Prabhakara Sastry came to his rescue. He told the old Raja that "Buddha is our God" and Buddhistic scriptures were part of Hindu scriptures.

Mr. Prasad translated the works of Kshemendra which until then were not within the reach of those who did not know Sanskrit. Whatever he wrote, he included an informative preface too. A most popular book like Bhagavadgita which he rendered into Telugu poems also included valuable information about tradition and custom on which an encrustation of unreasonable beliefs had already settled. His Telugu verses Neetineerajanam was a translation of Sundar Pandya's Neetidwishashti, a Sanskrit treatise on ethics. It was supposed to have been written by Pandya some where prior to the sixth century according to a preface by Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi.

*Vasireddi Durga Sadasiveswara Prasad*

Mr. Prasad's range of study was wide and his writings range from Vrukshaayurvedamu to Vidyaa Vinodamulu. The former was published by Achanta Lakshmipati in 1943.

Mr. Siva Rao meanwhile published a series of articles on the activities of the Britishers in India. One of his works was the digging up of the travel account of Enugula Veraswamiah, a translator in the service of the Britishers in the last century. Mr. Siva Rao published this Enugula Viraswmiah Kaasi Yaatra and it reveals a number of worth knowing features of social and political conditions of the day. A good piece in the museum of Telugu language. Mr. Siva Rao dug up from old records some astounding details about the first war of independence or the so-called mutiny. His book, 1857 Ku Poorva Rangamulu, is quite revealing. In fact there was no single subject whose history was not traced by Mr. Siva Rao. But the number of pamphlets he produced in those days of British oppression were astounding .... their names too were interesting .... Nirbhaagya Bhaaratam, Daridra Naaraavaneeyam, Satyaagraha Podhini etc. He also culled national songs from various sources and published a booklet "Paanchajanyam".

Some where in 1931 Mr. N. G. Ranga was arrested for comparing the British administrators to Jarasandha and other demons. Mr. Siva Rao undertook to defend Mr. Ranga in the court. The police officials did not know who Jarasandha was and the trial provided some real amusement to the spectators.

Both are prolific writers. In the case of Mr. Prasad a majority of his writings remain unpublished. Mr. Siva Rao had some of his works published. Their books are invariably instructive and informative.

Both are adamant and both believe that the strongest reason is hiding in nature and it has to be dug out by systematic search and research. They appear to be dogmatic but they are really against the dogma of ready-made beliefs. Both of them keep on supplementing their unpublished articles and writings with more and more information and details.

Mr. Siva Rao recently, it appears, told Mr. Prasad that it would be good if they started a journal to publish good articles, their own and those of others on various aspects of the national life and history. Mr. Prasad, a week hence, brought to him articles on several aspects of the nation and enough material for several issues of the unpublished journal. (G.K.).